



EXERCISING PARENTAL AUTHORITY
SDPD Neighborhood Policing Resource Team
April 13, 2012

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Good citizenship begins at home. Parents bear the primary responsibility for the actions of their children. (Everything in this paper also applies to legal guardians.) They must set good examples for their children at home and in their community, teach morals and values, provide a safe home environment, make sure that their children get a good education, direct their children into constructive activities, be involved in their children's activities, make their children responsible and accountable for their actions, etc.

Notwithstanding parent's best efforts, children can be influenced by peer pressures and pick up bad behavior outside the home. Parents must learn to recognize signs that indicate their child may be involved in gangs, drug and alcohol abuse, graffiti vandalism, and other problems, and deal with them as early as possible. They must also make sure that their children abide by the curfew law, attend school, drive safely, stay away from guns, etc. If they cannot deal with these problems on their own, they can get help and referrals from the Juvenile Services Team at their local SDPD Area Station. The addresses and phone numbers of these Stations are listed below.

Central Division	2501 Imperial Ave., San Diego 92102	(619) 744-9500
Eastern Division	9225 Aero Dr., San Diego 92123	(858) 495-7900
Mid-City Division	4310 Landis St., San Diego 92105	(619) 516-3000
Northeastern Division	13396 Salmon River Rd., San Diego 92129	(858) 538-8000
Northern Division	4275 Eastgate Mall, San Diego 92037	(858) 552-1700
Northwestern Division	12592 El Camino Real, San Diego 92130	(858) 523-7000
Southeastern Division	7222 Skyline Dr., San Diego 92114	(619) 527-3500
Southern Division	1120 27th St., San Diego 92154	(619) 424-0400
Western Division	5215 Gaines St., San Diego 92110	(619) 692-4800

Parents who fail in these responsibilities may be legally liable in various ways for the acts of their children. They may be charged with contributing to the delinquency of a minor, and held liable for restitution, fines, penalties, and civil damages.

Many good ideas for parenting and activities for children are contained in the *San Diego Family* and *San Diego Parent* magazines, which are published monthly and available free at many libraries, grocery and toy stores, schools, and other family-oriented establishments. They also contain calendars of family and children's events in San Diego County, many of which are free.

Another resource for parents is the San Diego Community College's continuing education program. It offers a variety of free classes at Centers throughout the City on child development, family relations, and many other topics. Call the San Diego Community College at **(619) 388-1800** for information on parenting classes.

Parents can get answers to many legal questions concerning their children from a booklet published by the State Bar of California entitled *Kids and the Law: An A-to-Z Guide for Parents*. It deals with a range of subjects from the "Age of Majority" to "Work Permits and Taxes" with references to the relevant code sections. It also contains a glossary of legal terms. It is not, however, intended to substitute for the advice of an attorney. And it may not provide the latest code references. The text is available in English and Spanish on the State Bar's website at **www.calbar.ca.gov**. Copies in English, Spanish, or Chinese can be ordered by e-mailing the State Bar at **kids@calbar.ca.gov** or calling **(888) 875-5297**.

When a child becomes 18, he or she acquires a new set of legal rights and responsibilities. These deal with jury duty, voting, housing, contracts, torts, etc. They are discussed in question and answer form in a booklet entitled *When You Become 18: A Survival Guide for Teenagers*. The text of this booklet is available on the State Bar's website in English, Spanish, Chinese, or Korean. Copies can be ordered by calling the State Bar or e-mailing it at **18@calbar.ca.gov**. Parents can use this booklet to help their children make the transition to young adults.

Some general parenting tips are listed below:

- Make time every day to discuss the day's events with your children. Encourage them to tell you about anything that makes them uncomfortable, or scares or confuses them. Listen to what they say and never underestimate their fears or concerns. Show them that you are always concerned about them. Effective communication is the most important factor in child safety.
- Have clear family rules. The consequences of breaking them should be clear.
- Be a good role model. Actions speak louder than words. Be the person you want your children to be.
- Discuss the consequences of tobacco, alcohol, drug use, etc. Tobacco is addictive. It yellows teeth, fouls breath, and kills. Drugs, including alcohol, alter judgment and perspective, and interfere with physical, emotional, and social growth. They are also addictive.
- Know what your children are doing. Know what they do in school and after school. Know their friends. Be involved in their lives.
- Educate yourself on the social and emotional needs of your children.
- Be alert for any changes in your child's behavior. Look and listen for things that indicate something is troubling him or her. Children are often uncomfortable in disclosing disturbing events or feelings because they are concerned about your reactions to their problems. When they do talk about their problems be calm, compassionate, reassuring, and nonjudgmental as you work with them to resolve the problem.

- The following are indications that a girl might be sexually exploited: frequent truancy from school, bruises and other signs of physical abuse, and unidentifiable sources of money and goods.

The rest of this paper describes some programs in which children can be enrolled, discusses how parents can prevent and deal with various problems involving their children, and defines some of the liabilities that parents may face if they fail to fulfill their responsibilities. Additional information on child safety and security can be found in the Crime Prevention and Education section of the SDPD website at www.sandiego.gov/police.

YOUTH PROGRAMS

There are a large number of youth programs in the city of San Diego. Two in which the SDPD is involved are described below.

STAR/PAL

One good way for parents to direct their children into constructive activities is to enroll them in the City's Sports Training, Academics, and Recreation (STAR) program, which has recently merged with the County's Police Athletic League (PAL). The goals of this county-wide program are to: (1) provide academic and athletic opportunities for youths, (2) establish new programs, (3) hold city-wide competitions in a variety of activities, and (4) create positive relationships between youths and police officers, other City and County personnel, and community members. Any youth, regardless of athletic ability, can participate in flag football, cheerleading, basketball, track and field, soccer, golf, rookie baseball, softball, tennis, and volleyball. Those who want to pursue academics can get help with homework, reading, math, and many other subjects. STAR/PAL will also sponsor trips to sporting events, museums, and other points of interest. Parents can go to the STAR/PAL website at www.starpal.org for information about youth opportunities, programs, events, etc. They can also get information by calling the STAR/PAL Office at **(619) 531-2718**.

KIDZWATCH Academy

This is an eight-week program for children 5 to 11 years old. Parents and children attend two-hour classes on Saturdays at various locations in the city. They learn personal, fire, water, and bicycle safety, as well as nature awareness, community involvement and volunteering, and other things that will help the children become safe, strong, and confident individuals. The classes are taught by professionals in these fields, including police officers, firefighters, lifeguards, and park rangers. Call the STAR/PAL Office at **(619) 531-2721** further information about enrollment.

DEALING WITH SPECIFIC PROBLEMS

Notwithstanding parent's best efforts, children can be influenced adversely by peer pressures and pick up bad behavior outside the home. Parents must learn to recognize signs that indicate their child may be involved in gangs, drug and alcohol abuse, graffiti vandalism, and other problems, and deal with them as early as possible. They must also make sure their children abide by the curfew law, attend school, drive safely, stay away from guns, etc. And they should be alert for warning signs of suicide. Information about various actions parents can take to prevent juvenile delinquency, violence, and victimization, and other related subjects can be obtained by calling the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention of the U.S. Department of Justice at **(800) 638-8736**. Parents who cannot deal with their children's behavior on their own can get help from many agencies, several of which are mentioned in this section, and from the Juvenile Services Team at their local SDPD Area Station.

Gangs

Gang activities constitute not only a serious problem in the community but a great danger to your child. Children who are gang members will become criminals or likely victims of gang violence. If you see signs that your child is becoming involved with gangs, you need to act immediately to deal with the problem and get help if necessary.

The warning signs of gang involvement include the following: lack of interest in school, fights, changes in hairstyle and dress, changes in friends, tattoos, nicknames, graffiti on clothing and personal items, changes in personality,

staying out late at night, hanging out with known gang members and in known gang areas, possession of more money, etc. Additional information on gang awareness is available at your local SDPD Area Station. Presentations to groups of parents can be arranged by calling the SDPD Gang Unit at **(619) 531-2847**.

Parents whose children show signs of gang involvement or other problems need to take firm control of the situation. They need to reassert their involvement and control over their children's activities, dress, friends, and finances. If help is needed, it is available from many community organizations. Some of those that offer counseling and diversion programs are listed below.

- | | |
|---|----------------|
| • Barrio Station | (619) 238-0314 |
| • Casa Familiar | (619) 428-1115 |
| • Harmonium | (858) 566-5740 |
| • Metro United Methodist Urban Ministry | (619) 805-5526 |
| • Ralph Bunche Youth Center | (619) 527-0171 |
| • Safe San Diego | (858) 565-4148 |
| • San Diego Urban League | (619) 263-3115 |
| • Social Advocates for Youth (SAY) | (619) 283-9624 |
| • South Bay Community Services | (619) 420-3620 |
| • Union of Pan Asian Communities | (619) 232-6454 |
| • YMCA PRYDE Program | (619) 281-8313 |

Drugs

Parents can provide the best protection children have against drug abuse. However, peer pressures and other outside influences can often undermine your best parenting efforts. Indications that your child may be involved with drugs include the following:

- Loss of interest in activities, don't-care attitude
- Use of incense, room deodorant, perfume, mouthwash, or breath mints
- Different friends and clothing choices, new associations
- Drug paraphernalia
- Bottles of eye drops
- Missing prescription drugs, especially narcotics and mood stabilizers
- Personality or sudden mood changes, erratic behavior, rages, bouts of anger, temper flare-ups, more combative
- Anxiety or paranoia
- Increased forgetfulness
- Withdrawal from the family, frequent absences from home
- Lack of sleep, insomnia
- Hyperactivity, excessive energy
- Resistance to discipline
- Poor school work, truancy
- Lack of stamina, listless, hung over, fatigued
- Isolation, increased secretiveness
- Poor personal appearance and hygiene, e.g., watery and sunken eyes, poor complexion, weight loss, bad breath, etc.
- Need of money or unexplained affluence
- Missing items in home

Parents can get a great deal of information on drug prevention, abuse, intervention, treatment, and recovery from The Partnership at Drugfree.org at **www.drugfree.org/parent**. The parenting toolkit provides advice by age and tips on understanding teens, connecting with and protecting your kids, spotting drug and alcohol use, and helping if they are using. It is estimated that children who learn about the risks of drugs from their parents are up to 50 percent less likely to use drugs than those who do not

Many children are now using inhalants and prescription drugs instead of illegal ones. Parents need to keep their prescription pain killers, cough syrup, and other over-the-counter drugs locked away out of their children's reach. They should also do the following:

- Monitor their children's use of the Internet for visits to illegal online pharmacies and use of social media outlets to make connections and set up drug deals.
- Examine their credit card and bank statements for drug purchases, and text messages for indications of drug use.
- Search their rooms for drug paraphernalia, including tinfoil, hollowed-out pens, lighters, hose clamps, syringes, and spoons.
- Download and read the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) guide entitled *Prescription for Disaster: How Teens Abuse Medicines* from its website at www.getsmartaboutdrugs.com. Click on Prevent and then select the tool entitled *Prevent Prescription Drug Abuse*. This website has a great deal of other information of use to parents.
- Be a parent, not a friend or enabler.
- Dispose of prescription drugs properly. There are bins for them at all Sheriff's stations and a few SDPD Area Stations. Do not flush them down the toilet. That poses a threat to the environment.

Alcohol

Drinking is an adult privilege. It is illegal in California for anyone under 21 to drink or buy alcoholic beverages. While the majority of teens do not drink, most are faced with the opportunity and many fail to resist peer pressure to drink. Parents need to teach their children about the effects, dangers, and possible consequences of drinking, and should try to discourage it altogether. Drinking loosens inhibitions and leads to bad judgments that can result in traffic accidents with serious injuries, costly civil litigation, social embarrassment, hefty legal fines, college probation or loss of scholarships, unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, and various criminal acts.

Parents are the single most important influence on children's decision whether or not to drink. If you drink you should:

- Drink in moderation.
- Keep track of all alcoholic beverages kept at home.
- Have non-alcoholic beverages available at home.
- Never drive after drinking.
- Teach your children that it is not necessary to drink to have a good time.

If you do allow your minor children to drink at home, make sure it in moderation and closely supervised. And remember, San Diego Municipal Code (SDMC) Sec. 56.62 makes it unlawful to permit any other minors to consume alcoholic beverages in your home. First-time violations of this ordinance are punishable by a mandatory minimum fine of \$100 plus statutory penalty assessments. The fine is \$200 for second and subsequent offenses. Then if you permit your child or another child under the age of 18 to drink at your home, under California Business and Professions Code Sec. 25658.2 you would be punished by a term not to exceed one year in a county jail, or a fine not exceeding \$1000, or both if all of the following occur: (1) your child or another underage person has a blood-alcohol concentration of 0.05 or greater, (2) you knowingly permit your child or another underage person to drive a vehicle after leaving your home, and (3) your child or other underage person is found to have caused a traffic collision while driving the vehicle. And after January 1, 2011, under Assembly Bill (AB) 2486, known as the Teen Alcohol Safety Act of 2010, a parent will also be subject to civil liability when they serve alcohol to minors in their home if that is found to be the proximate cause of resulting injuries or death to a third person. Social hosts will no longer be immune from liability when they serve alcohol to minors.

Parents should always talk openly with their children about alcohol use and abuse. When they go out you should always ask the following six "W" questions: Where are you going? Why are you going there? Who are you going to be with? What are you going to do? Will there be alcoholic beverages? When will you be home? And when they return you should discuss how they handled the situation if any underage drinking was involved and how they

should handle it in the future. If you think your child has or may be developing an alcohol problem you can call San Diego Youth Services at **(619) 325-4696** for information and help.

Graffiti Vandalism

Parents need to discuss with their children the importance of respect for property and the effects graffiti has on the victim, vandal, and the vandal's family. SDMC Sec. 54.0411 makes parents civilly liable for up to \$25,000 of property damage caused by their minor children. SDMC Sec. 54.0413(e) makes parents reimburse the city for any reward that is paid for information leading to the arrest and conviction of their minor child for graffiti crimes. Furthermore, California Penal Code Sec. 594(d) makes a parent liable for any fine that his or her minor child is unable to pay. The amount of the fines depends on the amount of the damage; the maximum fine is \$50,000. Thus, parents have a strong incentive to make sure their children are not graffiti taggers. The signs of a graffiti tagger include: tags on clothes or other personal possessions; use of tagger jargon; frequent use of baggy jackets and small backpacks that can hide spray cans; paint or dye on hands and under fingernails; and used graffiti devices. If you think that your child might be involved with graffiti, call the Graffiti Control Hotline at **(619) 525-8522** for further information and organizations to call for assistance.

Curfew Violations

Parents should know the activities and whereabouts of their minor children (under 18 years old) and make sure that they are home during curfew hours, which is the period from 10:00 p.m. any evening of the week until 6:00 a.m. the following day in the City of San Diego. Minors can be cited for curfew violations under SDMC Sec. 58.0102, which also defines ten defenses to prosecution. These are summarized as follows:

- Accompanied by the minor's parent or guardian, or a responsible adult
- On an errand at the direction of the minor's parent or guardian, or a responsible adult, without any detour or stop
- In a motor vehicle involved in interstate travel
- In an employment activity, or going to or returning from an employment activity, without any detour or stop
- Involved in an emergency
- On the sidewalk abutting the minor's residence
- Attending or returning home from, without any detour or stop, an official school, religious, or other recreational activity supervised by adults and sponsored by the City of San Diego, a civic organization, or another similar entity that takes responsibility for the minor
- Exercising or returning home from exercising, without any detour or stop, First Amendment rights protected by the U.S. Constitution
- Travelling between activities listed above
- Emancipated pursuant to law

In addition, parents can be cited if they knowingly permit or by insufficient control to allow the minor to be present in any public place or on the premises of any establishment within the City of San Diego during curfew hours. The San Diego City Council approved the present version of this ordinance by passing an emergency ordinance on Feb. 22, 2010 with minor language modifications to the existing ordinance because the California Court of Appeal for the Fourth District had ruled on Feb. 4, 2010 that the existing ordinance was unconstitutional.

Parents should be aware that the curfew hours vary by jurisdiction in the County of San Diego. For example, in the cities of Del Mar, Solana Beach, Poway, Escondido, Chula Vista, and Coronado they are from 11:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m. Parents should check the curfew hours for any jurisdiction in which their children might drive at night. And the evening curfew time is an hour earlier than the time a child under the age of 18 with a provisional California driver license cannot drive without a licensed parent, guardian, other adult 25 years of age or older, or licensed or certified driving instructor in the vehicle.

Daytime Loitering and Truancy

Parents must also make sure that their children are attending school during school hours. It is unlawful under SDMC Sec. 58.05(b) for any juvenile who is subject to compulsory education to loiter in any public or unsupervised place, or on the premises of any establishment between the hours of 8:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. on any day when school is in session for the juvenile. And under SDMC Sec. 58.05(b)(3) it is unlawful for the parent of any juvenile to knowingly permit or by insufficient control to allow the juvenile to violate this daytime loitering ordinance. Parents will be warned the first time the juvenile is arrested. And they may be fined up to \$1,000 and/or six months in jail for subsequent violations.

Also, after January 1, 2011 under Senate Bill (SB) 1317, a parent of a child who is a chronic truant will be guilty of a misdemeanor punishable by a fine not exceeding \$2,000, or by imprisonment in a county jail for a period not exceeding one year, or both if he or she has failed to reasonably supervise and encourage the child's school attendance after being offered language accessible support services to address the child's truancy. A chronic truant is defined as any pupil subject to compulsory education who is absent without a valid excuse for ten percent or more of the schooldays in one school year.

Unsafe Driving

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of teen deaths in this country. In 2009 about 3,000 teens aged 15-19 were killed and over 350,000 were treated in emergency rooms for injuries suffered in motor vehicle crashes. For more information on this problem see the Teen Drivers Fact Sheet on the website of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at www.cdc.gov/Motorvehiclesafety/teen_drivers/teendrivers_factsheet.html. Because driving involves great risks of personal injury and property damage, and driver education only deals with driving skills, parents need to do the following to make their teens safe drivers:

- Know and understand your teen. Not all are responsible enough to drive at 16.
- Set a good example by following all traffic laws and safety rules when you drive. Wear your seat belt, drive the speed limit, limit distractions, never text or use a phone, maintain a safe following distance, etc.
- Take advantage of typical and usual situations to teach safe driving, e.g., to follow at a greater distance when the road is wet because your breaking distance will be greater.
- Select a high-quality driving school that encourages parental involvement and progress reports.
- Create a written parent-teen driving agreement that specifies rules, conditions, restrictions, and consequences of driving behavior. State that driving and drinking don't mix.
- Have your teen drive the safest vehicle the family owns, and make sure he or she is properly insured.
- Set a schedule for regular practice driving sessions with your teen. They should be no longer than 45 minutes. Be direct with your instructions and keep your comments as simple as possible. Stress defensive driving.
- Set a time each week to discuss safe driving.
- Discourage driving at night and with passengers.
- Make sure your teen gets enough sleep. Driving while drowsy can be as risky as driving while intoxicated.
- Stress the need for total concentration on driving, and avoidance of distractions from using cell phones or text messaging.
- Stay out of cars that others might drive in an unsafe manner.
- Teach basic vehicle mechanics and what to do in case of an accident or emergency.
- Stress the criticality of all persons in the vehicle wearing seat belts.

Another reason for parents to be concerned about their children's driving is that parents are legally responsible for any injuries and damage that their minor children might cause while driving. Information about driving and traffic safety can be obtained by calling the SDPD Traffic Division's Community Relations Office at **(858) 495-7822**. Another good source of information is the Automobile Club of Southern California's website. Visit its page on teen driving safety at www.aaa-calif.com/auto/safety/teens.aspx. It has links to California's provisional driver's licensing program and an example parent-teen driving agreement. The former, in California Vehicle Code Sec. 12814.6, states that during the first 12 months after issuance of a provisional license the licensee may not drive between the hours of 11 p.m. and 5 a.m. or transport passengers who are under 20 years of age unless accompanied and supervised by a licensed driver who is the licensee's parent, a licensed driver who is 25 years of age or older,

or a licensed or certified driving instructor. There are several exceptions to these restrictions, one being that the licensee can transport an immediate family member under the age of 20 if he or she has a signed statement from a parent verifying the reason and containing a probable date that the necessity of the transportation will have ceased.

Parents should also warn their children about staged accidents. These usually occur in one of two ways: (1) a group of people stage accidents and collect each other's insurance money, or (2) individuals crash into innocent drivers to make their insurance premiums skyrocket. California is one of the top four states in the nation with this problem. For more information on staged accidents and videos on how they are set up go to the National Insurance Crime Bureau's website at **www.nicb.org** and click on Staged Accident Scenarios under Video/Audio Clips. Parents should then tell their children the following to avoid becoming a victim of a staged accident:

- Never tailgate. Leave enough space to stop if the vehicle in front of you stops. And look beyond that vehicle for changed traffic conditions that might cause it to slow or stop.
- Look over your shoulder for better visibility when backing out of a parking space or driveway. Don't rely on your mirrors. And back out slowly.
- Drive defensively and be aware of your surroundings. Be extra cautious on freeway ramps, at stop signs, in parking lots, when merging into traffic, and making turns.

And if they're ever involved in an accident, to do the following:

- Call **911** if anyone is injured.
- Take photos of damage to vehicles and injuries to people involved.
- Get the names and phone numbers of all people involved.
- Get the names and phone numbers of any persons who witnessed the accident.

Gun Violence

Gun violence has become a major health issue. In 2005 firearms were the leading cause of homicides and suicides of young people 15 to 24 years old in the United States. Parents need to teach their children that: (1) guns don't solve problems; (2) guns can kill or cause lifelong disabilities; and (3) there are enormous differences between real life and the fantasy world of television and all of its violence. Furthermore, parents need to exercise complete control over any guns in their home. Those who have guns should keep them unloaded, uncocked, and stored in a securely locked container. The Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence suggests that gun owners adhere to the following additional guidelines:

- Store your gun and its ammunition in separate locations known only to you.
- Store your ammunition in a locked container away from heat and moisture. Never throw it out in the trash.
- Child-proof your revolver by placing a sturdy and tamper-resistant child-safety lock on the trigger or on the firing mechanism.
- Child-proof your semi-automatic handgun by removing the magazine, disassembling the frame from the slide and magazine or securing it with a child-safety lock.
- Never leave the keys to your child-safety locks or gun and ammunition storage containers where they are accessible to others. And make sure the keys cannot be duplicated.

Parents can get help from a Juvenile Service Team officer at their local SDPD Area Station regarding signs that their children might be involved with guns, where to look for guns that children might hide at home, and what discipline measures would be appropriate. Any guns that are found should be turned in at any SDPD facility. Answers to questions about gun safety can be obtained by calling the SDPD Pistol Range at **(619) 527-6070**.

Information on effective strategies for preventing violence against youth can be obtained at **www.preventviolence.org**. This site also contains facts and data, and up-to-date information on violence prevention activities in California. At the national level the National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center's website at **www.safeyouth.org** contains information on hot topics, prevention and intervention programs, publications, and research and data on violence committed by and against children and teens.

Shoplifting

Shoplifting is not a game or sport. It is theft! It has serious consequences for both the child and the parent. If the value of the merchandise taken is less than or equal to \$400, the crime is petty theft. The first time it is punishable as a misdemeanor with a fine of at least \$50 but not more than \$1000, or imprisonment in the county jail not exceeding six months, or both. The second time it is punishable as a felony with imprisonment in the county jail or the state prison not exceeding one year. If the value of the merchandise taken is more than \$400, the crime is grand theft, which is punishable as a felony the first time. As noted in below under parental liability, judges can order parents to pay these fines for their minor children.

For petty thefts by an un-emancipated minor, California Penal Code Sec. 490.5(b) makes parents liable to the merchant for civil damages of not less than \$50 nor more than \$500, plus costs. In addition, parents are liable for the full retail value of the things taken if they are not recovered in a merchantable condition. Total damages are limited to \$500 for each action brought under this section.

Signs that your child might be shoplifting include: wearing new clothes or jewelry, or possessing items that you know he or she does not have money to buy; finding tags or package wrapping hidden in the trash; wearing baggy clothes or jackets when it is warm; and leaving the house with an empty backpack or large purse. Some of the things a parent can do to prevent shoplifting include the following: teaching that shoplifting is theft and that it is wrong to steal; telling your child that being in the company of a shoplifter is as bad as stealing, and that all persons involved can be punished; encouraging your child to choose friends carefully; knowing your children's friends; keeping your child busy to minimize unsupervised free time; and perhaps as a last resort, enrolling your child in a shoplifting prevention class. You can get information on this and other classes, workshops, and programs for juveniles and parents by calling the Corrective Behavior Institute at **(619) 644-5500**.

Internet and Cell Phone Dangers

Although the vast majority of online services and Internet material is legitimate and benign, there have been numerous incidents of children receiving pornographic material, providing personal information under the pretext of possibly winning a prize, or sending money for promised benefits or products. Warning signs of these dangers include excessive late-night computer use, secretive behavior about computer associates, hidden files or directories, and password-protected bios, files, or logical drives.

If you are not familiar with computers, the Internet, and social networking you should visit **www.NetSmartz411.org**, the premiere Internet-safety helpdesk and hotline, to help educate yourself. You should also sit down with your children to have them show you the websites they visit, how they navigate through the Internet, and how they use social networking sites. To better understand the latter you should try networking yourself. This is a great way to connect with your children on computer-related matters.

You should do the following to minimize Internet dangers that your children may encounter:

- Start early. Talk to your children about online behavior, safety, and security as soon as they start using a computer, cell phone, or any mobile device. Supervise closely the choice of websites for young children. Continue to monitor online activities as your children get older and more independent.
- Set reasonable guidelines and time limits for Internet and cell phone use, and social networking. Prohibiting Internet use is not a good idea because it is too easy for children to establish accounts at a friend's house or many other places. But do set time limits on computer use. People, not computers, should be their best friends and companions.
- Keep the computer in the family room or other area where its use can be monitored. Don't allow computers and mobile devices such as laptops and smart phones to be used in your children's bedrooms. And don't allow your children to have separate passwords and log-on names.
- Post clear, simple, easy-to-read rules for Internet use on or near the computer. Discuss these rules with your children and make sure they understand the reasons for them. Visit **www.NetSmartz.org** for examples of rules and safety tips. Your supervision and attention is the best way to protect your children when using the Internet.

- Know what Internet access your children have away from home, i.e., at a friend's home, libraries, schools, and cell phones and other wireless devices, and have a plan to monitor their online activities there as well as at home.
- Initiate conversations with your children about their Internet use. Communicate your values, be patient and persistent, and don't rush through conversations. Encourage your children to come to you with any problems they encounter online.
- Make sure they understand the importance of password and privacy protection, and not to share passwords or log-on names with anyone else. And don't let them use their pet's names as passwords.
- Have your children request your permission to exchange phone numbers or meet another child they have "talked" to online. Consider talking to the other child's parents about a meeting and accompanying your child to the meeting, which should be in a public place. Tell your children that caution is needed because people online are not necessarily who they might seem to be.
- Discourage your children from visiting chat rooms, especially those with video, even if they claim to be child friendly. Persons who would harm children use these websites to entice children.
- Use filtering software to scan for offensive words and phrases in chat rooms and then end the conversations by signing off.
- Install a browser that limits the websites that your younger children can visit to those vetted by educational professionals. Some will send you periodic e-mails that detail you children's Internet activity.
- Install a monitoring service like McGruff SafeGuard. It's free and also scans any chat or text conversations for bad language and other inappropriate communications. Go to **www.gomegruff.com** for details of this service.
- Have your children promise not to turn off any programs you might install to monitor their computer use.
- Understand how online services work.
- Check the computer's cache and history to see what websites have been accessed.
- Ask your children for their passwords and log-on names, and to share their blogs and online profiles with you. Be aware that they can have multiple accounts on multiple services. Search for you children's identifying information and monitor their screen name(s) and websites for inappropriate content. Also monitor their texts to make sure they are not receiving any threatening or harassing messages, or are sending, receiving, or saving any sexts.
- Learn the meaning of the acronyms your children use in texting. Go to **www.netlingo.com/acronyms.php** for a list of acronyms and their definitions, e.g., PAL means parents are listening.
- Make sure your child's screen name does not reveal any identifying information such as name, age, location, school. A screen name should be benign and innocuous, e.g., the first letter of each word in an easily-remembered phrase.
- Prohibit your children from downloading any games, movies, programs, etc., trying to win "free" things, or buying things without your permission.
- Tell your children it's not safe to put photos or any type of personally identifying information on a personal website without privacy settings, even if they promise to give the website address to people they know. Anyone in the world can access such a website. Also, personally identifying information should not be published on a group website or in an Internet yearbook. Group photos are preferable to individual photos only if no names are published.
- Have your children ask permission before listing any adults as "friends" online, even if they are teachers, relatives, or your friends.

Children who use social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace should be warned about online predators and harassers. They should be taught to do the following to prevent and deal with any problems that might arise:

- Never to give out your name, address, phone number, or any other personal information that can identify you. Avoid posting anything that would enable a stranger to find you, e.g., school names. Members' profiles become public information.
- Never say you are home alone.
- Don't post anything that you wouldn't want the world to know, especially anything or language that might embarrass you later, e.g., in applying for college or a job. What's uploaded can be downloaded and passed around by others and be posted online forever. It can't be taken back even if it's deleted from a site.
- Never send out any pictures of yourself, family members, or friends.
- Be careful about adding strangers to your list of "friends." People aren't always who they say they are.

- Come to me to discuss any harassment, hate speech, and inappropriate content you receive.
- Check comments regularly. Ignore and don't respond to any that are mean or embarrassing. Just log off if the harassment bothers you.
- Avoid misleading people into thinking you are older or younger than you are.
- Don't talk about sex or use any sexually explicit language.
- Block people from sending you messages or e-mail, or delete them from your "buddy list" if they harass you.
- Change your password if someone hacks into your profile. Change your username and e-mail address if someone repeatedly bothers you.
- Have me contact the company that runs the site to have any your profile deleted if it was created or altered without your knowledge.
- Talk to me if you are upset about what is being said about you. If you are scared or threatened we will contact a Juvenile Service Team officer at your nearest SDPD area station and inform your Internet Service Provider.

Children also need to be given rules for using cell phones and be warned of dangers in their use. Rules should deal with when and where phones can be used, what they can and cannot be used for, and etiquette and safety in texting. You need to set good examples in the use of phones, e.g., not while driving. One thing that phones should not be used for is sexting, i.e., the sending or forwarding of sexually explicit photos, videos, or messages. In addition to risking their reputation and friendships, they could be breaking the law if they create, forward, or even save this kind of message. The following are some good rules for texting.

- Be polite and respect others. Avoid using shorthand that might lead to misunderstandings. Think about how a message might be read and understood before sending it.
- Ignore messages from people you don't know.
- Block numbers of people you don't want to hear from.
- Don't post your cell phone number on the Internet.
- Never provide personal or financial information in response to a text message.
- Use Cc: and Reply all: with care.

Cyberbullying is another problem you should talk to your children about. You should tell them that they can't hide behind the messages they send or pictures they post, and that hurtful messages not only threaten the victim, but they make the sender look bad and can bring scorn from peers. Such messages are also a misdemeanor under California law for which the sender can be punished by up to one year in a county jail, by a fine of not more than \$1,000, or both. Also, you should also make sure your own conduct does not encourage bullying, i.e., that you don't make mean-spirited comments about others or act unkindly to them.

You also need to be prepared to help your children if they become a victim of bullying. You should encourage them to show you any online messages or pictures that make them feel threatened or hurt. If you fear for your child's safety you should call the SDPD on its non-emergency number, **(619) 531-2000** or **(858) 484-3154**. Otherwise tell your child not to respond, save the messages and pictures for evidence, and keep you informed. Call the SDPD again if the bullying persists. Here are some other things your child should do:

- Report the bullying to the website or network where it appears.
- Delete the bully from your list of "friends" or "buddies," or block the bully's username or e-mail address.
- Share these measures with a friend who is a victim of bullying. Bullying usually stops quickly when peers intervene on behalf of the victim.

Any suspected online sexual exploitation or attempt by an adult to meet your child should be reported immediately to the San Diego Internet Crimes against Children Task Force at **(858) 715-7100** and the Cyber Tipline at **www.cybertipline.com** or **(800) 843-5678**. The former is the local law-enforcement agency that deals with these matters. The latter is managed by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) and is mandated by Congress to forward your information to the appropriate law enforcement agency for investigation. If your children or anyone in your home receives pornography depicting children or your children receive sexually explicit images, report the imagery to ICAC and keep it open on your computer until an investigator comes to see it. Do not copy or download it. In the meantime you can use your computer for other things or turn your monitor off.

Children should also be warned about virus creators, identity thieves, and spammers. These cyber-criminals are increasingly targeting users of social networking sites in an effort to steal their personal data and the passwords to their accounts. One of the tactics they use to gain access to this information involves sending social networking users e-mails that appear to come from online “friends.” For example, some Facebook users have been receiving e-mails from “friends” that claim to contain a video of them. When they click on it they download a virus that goes through their hard drives and installs malware (malicious software). The virus, known as Koobface, then sends itself to all the “friends” on the victim's Facebook profile. A new version of the virus also is affecting users of MySpace and other social networking sites. Cyber-criminals are tricking social networking users into downloading malware by creating fake profiles of friends, celebrities, and others. Security experts say that such attacks, which became widespread in 2008, are increasingly successful because more and more people are becoming comfortable with putting all kinds of personal information about themselves on social networking sites. They warn that users need to be very careful about what information they post because it can be used to steal their identities.

To avoid these problems on social networking sites or anywhere in the Internet, you should warn your children to:

- Not to click on any links, videos, programs, etc. provided in messages, even if a “friend” encourages you to click on them.
- Get program updates directly from the company’s website, not through a provided link.
- Customize your personal privacy settings so only your “friends” have access to the information you post.
- Read your network’s privacy policy regularly to stay informed on how it uses or discloses your information.
- Scan your computer regularly with an anti-virus program. Make sure the program is kept up to date, preferably automatically.
- Be suspicious of anyone, even a “friend,” who asks for money over the Internet.
- Don’t open or forward chain letters. Just delete them. They are nuisances at best and scams at worst. And many contain viruses or spyware.
- Watch out for “free” stuff. Don’t download anything unless it’s from a trusted source and it’s been scanned with security software. “Free” stuff can hide malware.
- Do not buy or download free anti-spyware software in response to unexpected pop-ups or e-mails, especially ones that claim to have scanned your computer and detected malicious software.
- Make sure the pop-up blocker in the tools menu of your browser is turned on. This will prevent most pop-up ads. If you do get one, be careful in getting rid of it. Never click on any of its boxes. By clicking on No or Close you may actually be downloading malware onto your computer. And even clicking on the X in the upper right-hand corner can initiate a download instead of closing the ad. To be safe on a PC, hold down the Ctrl and Alt keys and hit Delete. Then in the Windows Security box click on Task Manger, and then click on End Task. This will clear your screen. Then run a full anti-virus scan.
- Avoid all online games and quizzes that request personal information, including your e-mail address. Providing this information can put your identity at risk.

Additional information on Internet dangers to children and how to keep children safe online is available on numerous websites. These include the following:

- San Diego Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force at **www.sdicac.org**
- National Cyber Security Alliance at **www.staysafeonline.org**
- San Diego County District Attorney at **www.sdcda.org**. See the Protecting Children Online page under Protecting the Community.
- GetNetWise at **www.GetNetWise.org**
- Federal Bureau of Investigation at **www.fbi.gov**. See *A Parent’s Guide to Internet Safety* under Cyber Issues on the Reports and Publications page.
- NCMEC at **www.ncmec.org**. See resources for parents and guardians.
- NET CETERA: Chatting with Kids about Being Online at **www.onguardonline.gov**.
- *Living Life Online* at **<http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/microsites/livinglifeonline/index.shtm>**.

Juvenile Victimization

Although the overall crime rate is decreasing, juvenile-on-juvenile crime is increasing. Young people are about three times more likely to be victims of violent crimes than adults. Outside of the home, they are most likely to be victimized at the end of the school day. Some safety principles your child should know include the following: develop conflict resolution skills, avoid deserted locations, avoid threatening persons, travel with a friend(s), always let someone know where you are going, walk confidently and be assertive, meet stares eye-to-eye, never appear vulnerable or weak, be familiar with places to go for help. School police can often provide assistance in dealing with this problem.

Students, teachers, and parents can call Crime Stoppers at **(888) 580-8477** to provide anonymous tips about safety concerns and potential problems at their schools. And students in the San Diego Unified School District can receive cash rewards of up to \$1000 for tips or information that solve or prevent campus violence or vandalism to school property. However, actual school emergencies should still be reported by calling **911**.

Media Violence

Media violence is also a health hazard for children. It has been estimated that young people have seen over 200,000 acts of violence by the time they graduate from high school. This exposure may result in aggressive attitudes and behavior, and insensitivity to violence. The following 10 tips from the Minnesota Medical Association are designed to help deal with this problem: (1) set clear limits on TV viewing and video game playing, (2) don't use the TV as a babysitter, (3) don't make TV the focal point of family activities in the home, (4) offer other enjoyable activities at home, (5) select what your children watch, (6) ban unacceptable programs, (7) identify high-quality programs, (8) know what your children are watching, (9) discuss media violence, and (10) have a voice in local TV programming.

Child Abduction

The number of children reported missing each year is staggering. The following precautions will help protect your child from abduction:

- Never leave your child alone in a vehicle, restroom, store, playground, or other public place. Accompany younger children to restrooms.
- Walk your child to and from school, and point out dangerous spots and safe places to go for help.
- Have your child walk or bike to and from school with a friend. There is safety in numbers.
- Don't put your children's names on the outside of their clothes. Children may respond more readily to a stranger who calls them by name.
- If your child takes a bus to and from school, have your child stay with a group while waiting for the bus.
- Make sure that the school will not release your child to anyone but yourself or a person previously designated by you, and that the school will call you back to verify any call saying that some person will come to pick up him or her.

And make sure you teach your child the following:

- Never to leave school with anyone they don't know.
- Turn around and run to the nearest safe place if a person appears to be following them on foot, or a vehicle slows or stops by them.
- Not to hitchhike or accept a ride from anyone unless you have told them it is OK in each instance. Tell them to say NO and run away to a safe place if offered a ride by a stranger. If avoidance is not possible tell them to make a big scene by screaming, yelling, kicking, and resisting.
- The difference between a stranger who may be a danger and one who may be helpful. The simple "stranger-danger" message is inappropriate because the danger to children is much greater from someone who is not a stranger.
- Stay away from any adult who asks for help, e.g., "Can you help me find my dog?" or asks for directions (an adult should ask another adult, not a child for help), or tries to get you to go somewhere with them, e.g., "Your mom's hurt and she told me to come get you."

- Keep all doors and windows locked when at home alone. And not to open the door to a stranger or let an uninvited neighbor or acquaintance into your home.
- Not to tell a caller that you are not at home. Have your child say you cannot come to the phone, ask the caller to leave a message, and say you will call back.

For additional information on how to prevent child abduction and what to do if it happens go to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) website at **www.ncmec.org** and look at the resources for parents.

If your child goes missing you should provide identification information to law enforcement officials immediately. A convenient place for this information is in a Child ID Kit, which you can obtain for free at the San Diego FBI Office on 9797 Aero Dr. Call **(858) 499-7464** first to make sure Kits are available. The Kit provides a place for your child's photos, fingerprints, personal characteristics, and DNA for use in emergencies. The FBI also has a Child ID app that you can download to your iPhone and other types of mobile devices for free from the APP Store on iTunes. This app also includes tips on keeping children safe and specific guidelines on what to do in the first critical hours after a child goes missing.

Suicide

There were 392 deaths by suicide in San Diego County in 2011. Thirty-nine of these were ages 15-24. This makes suicide the third leading cause of non-natural death in this age group behind unintentional injuries and homicides. In its Youth Risk Behavior Survey of 1,667 students in 31 San Diego Unified School District high schools in the spring of 2009, the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that 13.9 percent of the respondents had seriously considered attempting suicide in the previous 12 months, and 6 percent actually attempted suicide at least once. The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) says that suicide can be prevented because most people who are suicidal give some warning to a friend or family member. Thus, parents can prevent suicides by their children by learning to recognize the signs of a child at risk, taking those signs seriously, and knowing how to respond to them.

More than 90 percent of the people who kill themselves are suffering from one or more psychiatric disorders. These include depression, substance abuse and dependence, eating and personality disorders, etc. These are both recognizable and treatable. Although most depressed people are not suicidal, most suicidal people are depressed. Signs of depression include the following:

- Feeling hopeless, helpless, worthless, sad, or empty
- Self-reproach or excessive or inappropriate guilt
- Feeling angry or moody
- Excessive crying
- Loss of interest in things that used to be fun
- Loss of job
- Avoiding friends or feeling alone when with friends
- Isolation from family and friends
- Divorce, separation, or stress in the family
- Change in sleep patterns
- Change in appetite or weight
- Loss of health
- Intense anxiety, agitation, or restlessness
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Decreased concentration, indecisiveness, or poorer memory

Other warning signs of a person considering suicide are:

- Talking, reading, or writing about suicide or death
- Talk of hurting or killing self
- Visiting friends to say good-bye

- Engaging in risky or self-destructive behavior, e.g., drug or alcohol abuse
- Giving things away
- Acquiring means of killing self, e.g., buying a gun, stockpiling pills or drugs, etc.

If your child threatens suicide you should call the San Diego County 24-Hour Crisis Line at **(888) 724-7240** immediately. Otherwise if you observe any of these signs you should start by talking to your child. Express your concerns, ask if he or she is thinking about suicide and what the problems are, and listen to what your child says. You should help your child understand that his or her problems are temporary and can be solved with the help of a physician or mental health professional. And then get that help right away. If medication is prescribed, make sure it is taken and be alert for possible adverse side effects. And if it is not effective, ask the physician to prescribe another one. Finally, don't leave your child alone. For more information go to the AFSP's website at **www.afsp.org**.

MULTIPLE PROBLEMS

Several organizations offer programs that can help children with multiple problems. One is the YMCA Youth and Family Services offers classes, workshops, and counseling on many subjects. Parents should call **(619) 543-9850** for details.

The California National Guard has several youth programs for different age groups and areas of the state. One is a statewide residential program conducted at the Grizzly Youth Academy at Camp San Luis Obispo. It is called the Youth ChalleNge Program and is for 16 to 18 year-olds who are high school dropouts or at risk of dropping out. For further information call **(800) 926-0643**.

PARENTAL LIABILITY

In addition to the liabilities mentioned above, parents or guardians are legally liable in various ways for the acts of their children. These are additional reasons for parents to deal with their child's behavior before it results in criminal acts.

Contributing to the Delinquency of a Minor. Parents who fail in their legal duty to exercise reasonable care, supervision, protection, and control over their minor children can be charged with contributing to the delinquency of a minor, a misdemeanor punishable by one year in jail and/or a \$2,500 fine per count. This is stated in California Penal Code Sec. 272(a).

Liability for Fines, Penalties, and Restitution. Under California Welfare and Institutions Code Sec. 730.7 juvenile court judges might order parents to pay fines and penalties assessed against a minor that they have legal and physical custody and control of, and also to pay restitution to the victims of the crimes committed by their minor children. The upper limits on these payments are specified in California Civil Code Secs. 1714.1 and 1714.3, as noted below.

Liability for Civil Damages. Under the California Civil Code Sec. 1714.1 parents are liable for civil damages of up to \$25,000 for each tort or act of willful misconduct of a minor in their custody and control that results in injury or death to another person or in any injury to the property of another. This limit is adjusted every two years for changes in the California Consumer Price Index. If a parent is insured, the maximum liability of the insurer is set at \$10,000.

Civil Liability for Injury Caused by Firearms. Under California Civil Code Sec. 1714.3 parents are liable for injuries caused by the discharge of a firearm by a minor in their custody and control, where the minor was permitted to have the firearm or the firearm was left in a place accessible to the minor. Damages are limited to \$30,000 for injury to or death of one person, or \$60,000 for all persons in a single occurrence.

Restitution through Mediation. One way for parents or guardians to avoid liability for the acts of their minor children in civil lawsuits is to work out an agreement for repayment of the victim's losses. This can be done by mediators who assist the victim and the youth in talking about the incident and its consequences, get the youth to take responsibility for his/her actions, and draft a realistic restitution agreement.